

REMARKS

Claims 18 and 20 may be characterized as the independent claims, rather than claims 18-21 as designed by the Examiner. The remaining summary of claim rejections withdrawn in view of the amendment previously filed is noted.

Acknowledgement is noted of priority documents filed in this application.

Claims 3-10, 13-21 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, ¶ 1, because the specification reportedly does not reasonably provide enablement of designated aspects of the invention.

These claims have been amended in consideration of the Examiner's comments to define the invention more specifically. As noted by the Examiner at page 2, line 11 to page 3, line 11 in the Summary of the Invention, it should be noted that the phrase therein "the classification system determines whether the electronic document is acceptable based on the assigned priority," is more distinctively described later in the specification as "the classification system *enables a user* to determine the electronic document is acceptable based on the assigned priority." (page 23, line 25 to page 28, line 10).

That is, the documents are displayed in order of their priorities (page 24; lines 1-2). A user can refer to the documents based on their priorities. The user can select a document and display it. A screen example of the displayed document is shown in Figure 22. The check box 222 is provided on the screen. If the check box

222 is marked by the user, the final acceptance flag (field) is set to one (page 26, lines 22-23). For the document for which the final acceptance flag is one, the electronic mail notifying the business partner of acceptance of the cost estimation is generated (page 28, lines 6-8).

On the other hand, determining that a document including an item that does not meet the target value is rejected (as defined in claims 18, 20) is supported by the specification. Specifically, this determination is made in step 107 of Figure 10. If the value of an item (proposed volume, material, investment) included in the received document does not meet the target value in step 101, 103, or 105, the rejection flag is set to one. As described on page 13, lines 5-6, the rejection flag having a value of 1 indicates that the document (costs estimation) is rejected. Thus, the fact that documents including an item that does not meet the target value are determined as being rejected is submitted to be amply described in the specification and illustrated in the drawings.

And, contrary to the Examiner's assertion that extracting and assigning steps for each of documents that are not rejected is not reasonable, Applicants point out that, as illustrated in Figure 9, if the rejection flag is set to one in step 92, partner checking routine (step 96) and priority assignment (step 98) are not performed. Therefore, the steps of extracting and assigning are performed, as now set forth in claim 18, for documents that are not rejected.

In short, the written description amply indicates that the system enables a user to determine whether the electronic document is acceptable based on the assigned priority.

Regarding the Examiner's comment that there is no score included in the partner table, Applicants have amended claims 18 and 20 to define this aspect of the invention more specifically. As shown and described with reference to Figure 5, the score table 48 stores a score for each of the evaluated attributes (for example, business record, ranking, etc.). For the received document for a business partner, the attributes for the business partner are retrieved from the partner table 53 and then a score corresponding to the extracted attributes is obtained from the score table 48, as described, for example, on page 22, line 8-page 23, line 10. The score table is defined as "criteria table" in claim 18 which has been amended to recite that a score corresponding to the extracted attributes is stored in the criteria table. It is therefore respectively submitted that claims 3-10, 13-21 (and new dependent claims 22, 23 presented herewith) now define the invention with sufficient particularity, and with ample antecedent description in the specification to be patentable to Applicants.

Claims 3-7, 9-10, 13-21 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Legh-Smith '419 in view of Zhai '930 and Puram et al '340. This rejection is respectfully traversed with respect to these claims as amended herein.

These claims variously recite apparatus and method including “means for receiving the cost estimation as electronic document from a computer of each of the plurality of business partners via a network;

a criteria table for storing a target value for each of items included in the electronic document and a score that is predetermined in accordance with a value of each of the items;

a partner table for storing, for each of the plurality of business partners, a partner code for identifying the business partner and attributes evaluated for the business partner;

wherein the criteria table further stores a score that is predetermined corresponding to each of the evaluated attributes.”

In addition, the dependent claims are further restricted by specific recitations of characteristic of the criteria table, or controller, or the electronic document, or the like.

These aspects of the claimed invention are directed to classifying cost estimations received from a plurality of business partners, and the classifying is carried out with reference to both the items included in a cost estimation and attributes of a business partner from which the cost estimate is received.

These aspects of the claimed invention are not disclosed or even suggested by the cited references considered either alone or in the combination proposed by the

Examiner. Specifically, Legh-Smith '419 is not directed to classification of cost estimations from a plurality of business partners, in a manner as claimed by Applicants, nor to any such classification with respect to both the items in the cost estimation as well as the attributes of the business partner from which the cost estimation is received, as claimed by Applicants. And the 'keywords' in Legh-Smith '419 as referenced by the Examiner do not correspond to any aspects of Applicant's claimed invention. Distinctly, items in the claimed invention are those included in a cost estimation which may include as examples from the specification: proposed volume; proposed material; proposed investment (page 9, lines 15-20). If any such item of the cost estimation does not meet the target value, the cost estimation is rejected on substantial content involving more than merely a 'key word' referenced in Legh-Smith '419 by the Examiner.

Regarding Puram et al '340, the Examiner notes that this reference discloses a table including items for ranking and scoring skills of a candidate where the scores in the table can be used to determine the rate charged by each candidate to identify the best candidates. However, it must be noted in this reference: "after an employer has entered their needs data, the system searches the candidate records" (column 7, lines 34-35). In short, Puram et al. '419 searches the candidates in response to the input data by an employer, in contrast to the claimed invention in which attributes are extracted for each of the documents that are not determined as being rejected.

Further, according to the claimed invention, a partner code for identifying a business partner from which the document is received is read from the received document. The attributes evaluated for a business partner indicated by the partner code are extracted, and this aspect of the claimed invention finds no counterpart or any suggestion in Puram et al. '419.

These features of the claimed invention are supported by the specification. Specifically, Figure 3 shows a record sample of the estimation receipt DB 41, in which the contents of the cost estimation received from a business partner are stored (see, for example, page 8, lines 19-23 and page 9, lines 15-20). The contents of the cost estimation include partner code, proposed volume, and the like. The estimation receipt DB 41 is accessed to determine whether each item (proposed volume, investment, material, proposed cost) included in the cost estimation (document) meets the target value, as described on page 20, lines 10-19. Thereafter, the partner table 53 is accessed to extract the attributes for the partner code thus read from the cost estimation DB 41.

Puram et al. '419 does not disclose such features of the claimed invention regarding the extraction of the partner attributes. That is, Puram et al. '419 fails to disclose extracting attributes for each of the documents that are not determined as being rejected, and also fails to disclose reading from the received document a partner code for identifying a business partner from which the document is received.

In short, this reference fails to disclose extracting the attributes evaluated for a business partner indicated by the partner code thus read from the received document.

And, Zhai '930 is understood to score documents against selected user profiles, and compare such scores against selected threshold values to determine whether a document scores favorably, for example, against scores of a set of reference documents. And, despite the Examiner's assessment of "Zhai provides a table for disclosing the user criteria defined by the profile," it is submitted that this reference combined with Legh-Smith et al. '419 and/or Puram et al. '340 fails to yield any semblance of scoring and rejection in a manner as now claimed by Applicants. And, the Examiner recognizes the failure of disclosure of various aspects of the claimed invention in these references which therefore fail to establish even a *prima facie* basis including all the claimed elements or steps from which a proper determination of obviousness can be made. It is therefore respectfully submitted that claims 3-7, 9, 10, 13-21 are now patentably distinguishable over the cited art.

Claim 8 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Legh-Smith and Zhai as applied to claim 18 above, further in view of Lai '290. This rejection is respectfully traversed with respect to this dependent claim as amended herein.

This claim as amended herein, which depends from newly amended independent claim 18, is submitted to be patentable for that reason and for the further specific recitations of “the controller is further configured to enable a user to determine whether the electronic document is acceptable based on the assigned priority” and “the controller is further configured to generate an electronic mail for a rejection notice if it is determined that the electronic document is not acceptable, and to generate an electronic mail for an acceptance notice if it is determined that the electronic document is acceptable”.

These aspects of the claimed invention are not disclosed or even suggested by Lai ‘290 which is understood to detail a transaction between a merchant and customer that is implemented *through an escrow agent* which controls approval of a shipment in response to collection of payment therefor. Thus, the deficiencies of the disclosures in Legh-Smith et al. ‘419 and Zhai ‘930, as discussed in the above remarks are not ‘cured’ by the email notices of a type disclosed by Lai ‘290. And, these references also fail to disclose enabling a user to determine whether the electronic document is acceptable based on the assigned priority in a manner as claimed by Applicants. Thus, merely combining escrow-controlled transactions as disclosed by Lai ‘290 fails to establish even a *prima facie* basis including all of the claimed elements from which a proper determination of obviousness can be made.

It is therefore respectfully submitted that dependent claim 8 is now patentably distinguishable over the cited art.

The Examiner's Response to Applicants' Arguments are noted with appreciation. However, the claims as amended are submitted to refine the definition of the present invention sufficiently to overcome the Examiner's proffered analyses, and to align more specifically with the description in Applicants' specification.

It is therefore respectfully submitted that claims 3-10, 13-23 are now patentable to Applicant over the cited art.

Reconsideration and allowance of all claims are solicited. In the event the Examiner continues the rejections, it is requested that this amendment be entered in order to clarify the issues for appeal.

Respectfully submitted,
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